

Mlabri language

Mlabri is a language spoken by the Mlabri people in the border area between Thailand and Laos.

It is usually classified as a Khmuic language, a subgroup of the Austroasiatic languages. Linguist Jørgen Rischel has studied the language and described its peculiarities in several works. He divides the language into three varieties: one spoken by a small group in Laos and previously called *Yumbri*, and two others spoken by larger groups in Thailand. They differ in intonation and in lexicon.

Although it is possible to count up to ten in Mlabri, only the numerals one and two may be used to modify a noun, and the word for 'two' has uses closer to 'pair' or 'couple' in English than a numeral.

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Mlabri	
Native to	Thailand, Laos
Native speakers	130 (2007) ^[1]
Language family	Austroasiatic <ul style="list-style-type: none">Khmuic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mlabri
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	mra
Glottolog	mlab1235 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/mlab1235) ^[2]

Phonology

Mlabri distinguishes rounding in its back vowels. It does not have the register systems of some other Austroasiatic languages.

Front	Back	
	unrounded	rounded
i	ɯ	u
e	ɤ	o
ɛ	ʌ	ɔ
a		

All vowels occur long and short. /a/ is fronted after palato-alveolar consonants, and may approach [ɛ]. There is also a very short vowel /ɪ/ that has limited distribution. Schwas occur in pre-tonic syllables, but may be epenthetic. There are several diphthongs.

Consonants include the two implosive stops /b/ and /d/, attested in words such as *buʔ* 'slow' and *dʌŋ* 'can'.^[3] These apparent implosive stops could be analyzed as pre-glottalized stops, as pre-glottalization is also a used for sonorants. Consonants also include voiceless sonorants, as in *ɲɛʔ* 'new', *ŋtaʔ* 'tail', *ŋuh* 'sit',

lak '(there is) none', or *wep* 'shoulder'. Arguably, these could be analyzed as a sequence of /h/ and a sonorant.

Initial consonants

		Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Obstruent	aspirated	p ^h	t ^h	c ^h ~ s	k ^h	h
	tenuis	p	t	c	k	ʔ
	voiced	b	d	ɟ	g	
	glottalized	ʔb ~ b	ʔd ~ d			
Nasal	voiced	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
	voiceless	ᵐ	ᵑ	ɲ̥	ŋ̥	
Sonorant	voiced	w	l, r	j, ɟ		
	voiceless	w̥	l̥, (ɾ̥)			
	glottalized	ʔw	ʔj			

/ɾ̥/ is only attested in minor syllables.

Mlabri has a different set of consonants which occur at the ends of syllables, including aspirated sonorants /l^h, r^h, j^h/. The second is a trill, and the third more post-alveolar than palatal. Other final consonants are /p t c k ʔ m n ɲ ŋ h l r j w/

References

1. Mlabri (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/mra/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Mlabri" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/mlab1235>). *Glottolog* 3.0. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Baetscher, Kevin (2015). "Mlabri". *The Handbook of Austroasiatic Languages*. 2: 1003–1030.

Further reading

- Rischel, Jørgen, *Minor Mlabri. A Hunter-Gatherer Language of Northern Indochina*, 1995, ISBN 87-7289-294-3.
- Rischel, Jørgen, *Pan-dialectal databases: Mlabri, an oral Mon–Khmer language*, 2004 May, Lexicography Conference, Chiangmai.
- Schliesinger, Joachim, *Ethnic Groups of Laos, vol. 2*, White Lotus 2000, ISBN 974-480-036-4

External links

- Jørgen Rischel, *In what sense is Mlabri a West Khmuic language?* (https://web.archive.org/web/20080910210310/http://www.ostas.lu.se/ICSTLL/abstracts/55_Rischel.pdf)
- <http://projekt.ht.lu.se/rwaai> RWAAI (Repository and Workspace for Austroasiatic Intangible Heritage)
- <http://hdl.handle.net/10050/00-0000-0000-0003-66E5-6@view> Mlabri in RWAAI Digital Archive

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